



Public radio reporters document Bowden releasing a snowy owl.
Credit: Michigan DNR photo David Kenyon.

High-Tech Owls Improve Air Safety, Increase Knowledge – With an Assist from Wildlife Services

USDA Wildlife Services-Michigan (WS-MI) has been helping both airports and raptors through a decade-long trap-and-relocate program. This winter, WS-MI continues its work, capturing snowy owls at airports and relocating them away from danger.

In outfitting several snowy owls with radio-telemetry harnesses, WS-MI has assisted [Project SNOWstorm](#), a non-profit cooperative research partnership utilizing modern technologies to develop knowledge about snowy owls. The work may also provide useful information on how snowy owls use airports.

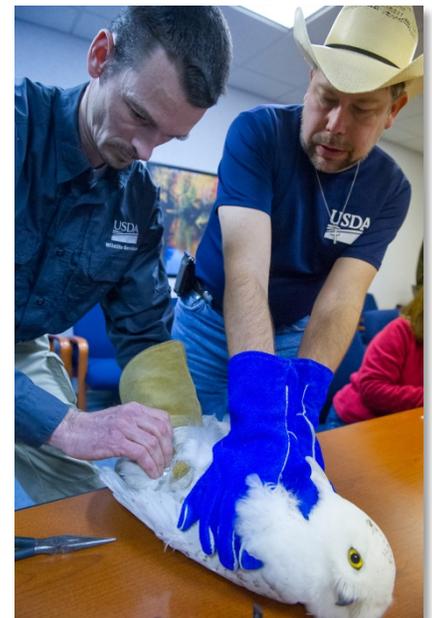
The size and flight pattern of snowy owls make them hazardous on an airfield, and they are resistant to being chased away from airports. To capture snowy owls, WS-MI biologist Aaron Bowden uses pole, Goshawk and Bal-chatri traps as well as bow nets. During the 2013-14 irruption, WS-MI staff -- and the airports they assist -- trapped and relocated 36 snowy owls. WS-MI relocated owls 16 times between December 2014 and mid-February 2015, working at 6 Michigan airports.



Bowden and Washburn install the telemetry harness.

Credit: USDA WS Peter Butchko

This winter Dr. Brian Washburn, of WS' National Wildlife Research Center, has assisted by outfitting the owls with GPS-GSM radio transmitters. An owl captured in January at the Gerald R. Ford Airport was the first owl caught and fitted with a harness by WS-MI personnel for Project SNOWstorm this year. In February, WS-MI captured two additional snowy owls which were outfitted with transmitters before release. They will provide valuable information on snowy owl behavior and movement.



Bowden and Washburn prepare snowy owl for release. Credit: Michigan DNR photo David Kenyon

biologists relocate 300-400 raptors away from airports.

“Capturing and relocating these birds is a win-win. It not only protects the birds, but also makes air travel safer around airports,” notes Bowden. Each year, WS-MI

To follow snowy owls trapped and released by WS-MI in conjunction with this effort, look for “Alma”, “Prairie Rhonde” and “Buckeye” at [Project SNOWstorm](#). Other WS airport-captured owls have included Monocacy, Baltimore, Philly and Amishtown.

Also, see Michigan Public Radio’s [Unlocking the secret world of the snowy owl](#)

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